

Richard Montgomery Cluster Testimony
Regarding the FY 2011 Operating Budget

Richard Montgomery Cluster

Richard Montgomery High School
Julius West Middle School
Beall Elementary School
College Gardens Elementary School
Ritchie Park Elementary School
Twinbrook Elementary School

Board of Education Public Hearing
Carver Education Services Center
January 20, 2010

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Richard Montgomery Cluster CIP Testimony
MCPS Board of Education
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Good evening, Superintendent Weast and members of the Board of Education. My name is Lara Turner and I am the MCCPTA Cluster Coordinator for the Richard Montgomery High School Cluster. On behalf of the RM Cluster, thank you for allowing me to speak to you this evening about the 2011 Operating Budget.

I know that we are wrapping up two evenings of testimony on this Operating Budget and many of the things the Richard Montgomery Cluster have identified as priorities have already been introduced and discussed by most of our peer clusters. So I will concentrate on our Cluster's most pressing concerns.

I would like to affirm that the RM Cluster is in full support of the Superintendent's Maintenance of Effort level request. Our Cluster also supports the operating budget priorities that have been recommended by MCCPTA. We understand that MCPS faces an uncertain funding situation in the coming years and are grateful for the opportunity to advise the Board of Education on our Cluster's concerns.

The RM Cluster understands that sacrifices must be made; however, if classroom size must be increased, we ask that you implement some standard that allows for schools not already suffering from over-filled classrooms to be the first to increase their class sizes. This way, rather than across-the-board increases that might disproportionately impact schools that are already suffering

from overcrowding, MCPS would be allowing for larger classrooms in schools that have the room to expand.

The largest concerns of the RM Cluster during this time of hardship are 1) maintaining supports, including Support Staff, in order to reduce the impact of increased class size and 2) maintaining a level of Transportation which would retain equity in our education system.

Transportation is vital to keeping MCPS's unique and successful programs accessible to all students. Without transportation, many children are prevented from pursuing an equal education. This is not acceptable. Whether it's the Maryland Legislature allowing MCPS to charge a fee for transportation, or MCPS exploring alternative fuels for its busses, or MCPS cutting other areas of the budget to maintain the current transportation system, or some other cost-cutting measure, the RM Cluster strongly believes that simply eliminating bus service is not acceptable and runs counter to the mission of this school system.

Retaining Support Staff, including counselors, psychologists, Academic Intervention, Reading Initiative, and Paraeducator positions, is a tremendous priority for the RM Cluster. The Reading Initiative position was created to ensure that all Kinder through Second Grade MCPS students meet County benchmarks and become independent readers by the end of second grade. The Reading Initiative position meets with students in small groups for 90 minutes of reading and writing instruction each day. The Academic Intervention position supports students who struggle academically and/or need acceleration in reading or math. The position also collaborates with teachers to plan and implement programs that support students. Paraeducators provide additional

support in crowded classrooms by giving extra attention and help to those students who need acceleration, enrichment, or a boost to achieve.

Additionally, MCPS maintains special programs, including IB and CI, which require certain classroom elements, including classroom-based staffing and a self-contained classroom. The programs require these unique support staff and it is critical to the continuation of these programs that these positions are not eliminated.

While these support staff positions were not created to reduce class size, they nevertheless help alleviate some of the detrimental effects of large classrooms. Therefore, it is imperative that these and other critical support positions that counteract the effects of large classrooms be preserved. As economic conditions worsen and home situations become more and more precarious for our students, it is critical that MCPS maintain institutional supports for those students who struggle and to help identify and meet the needs of our more proficient and advanced students.

I would like to close by discussing a system that doesn't work. I hail from the great state of Texas and was surprised to discover when my daughter was in elementary school that much of the funding for Texas schools is tied to local property taxes. This inequitable method creates a stratified system, where there exist "Have" and "Have Not" schools within the same cities - sometimes between neighborhoods mere miles from each other. When we moved to Maryland, I was very happy to find a school funding system that attempted to be as equitable as possible for our children. I believe this is a key to Maryland's educational success - that all children,

regardless of income, are given the opportunity and the tools needed to excel. We must attempt to maintain this success as much as possible because there will be greater personal economic disparity as our current financial crisis continues to impact the country. Public education is one institution in our society where financial means should not determine access.

Thank you.